

FACTSHEET: Safeguarding Children Living in Families with Parental Mental ill Health

Where a parent, carer or other family member has mental health issues, this may impact on children in the household and might involve risks of significant harm to them. Adult Services and Children's Services must work collaboratively to ensure that the voice of the child is heard and their circumstances are safeguarded.

The impact on the child

The links between the welfare of the child, in families where there are mental health problems, and the adult may be:

- Possible impairment to the child's development and adjustment to adulthood
- In some cases a threat to the child's safety
- The interactions between the child and parent may precipitate or aggravate the condition
- Specific symptoms which involve the child directly, like delusions
- The impact on the parent's day to day functioning of the illness and /or of the treatment
- The parent being emotionally unable to respond to the child
- Lack of consistency in the care of the child due to changes in family circumstances relating to hospital admissions
- Loss of concentration preventing the parent from keeping the child safe
- Access to medication by the child accidentally
- The child takes on the role of carer for the parent.

Positive factors to bear in mind

- There may be other adults in the household who can meet the child's needs
- The socio economic circumstances may be good and therefore provide financial security, support services and supportive social networks
- The child or children may have a good understanding of the condition and be resilient.

Collaborative Working

Close liaison between **all** Adult services, including health agencies such as GPs, and Children's Social Care is essential in the interests of children and their carers. This requires sharing of information where it is necessary to safeguard the health and welfare of a child.

Chapter 3.3.6 in the Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership Procedures provides a range of links to toolkits and national guidance to assist practitioners in determining how to proceed to safeguard a child.

'The Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family' guidance and toolkit developed by SCIE is particularly useful when working with parents and carers with mental health issues.

The Child Protection Process

A Practitioner who has concerns about the well-being of a child and about risks to a child should make a referral to Children's Social Care.

The key points in the Child Protection process are the Strategy Discussion, the Section 47 Enquiry and Core Assessment and the Initial Child Protection Conference. All agencies must participate, share information and collaborate.

There, should be explicit and ongoing links between the Child Protection Plan for the child and the Care Plan for the parent. All reviews should address the needs of both the child and the parent/carer.